



University of Dundee

Review of External Mission

Graham, Matthew

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In *External Mission: The ANC in exile, 1960-1990* Stephen Ellis offers a devastating critique of the 'official' history of the ANC by deconstructing the myths surrounding the movement, and revealing the intriguing and fractious nature of its liberation struggle. In this powerful book, based on a wide-range of new sources, including recently released files from the East German intelligence agency, the Stasi, Ellis provides a fresh insight and analysis into the complex and fascinating past of the ANC.

A key theme of the book is to illustrate how the South African Communist Party (SACP) managed to exert enormous influence and control over almost all aspects of the ANC. For scholars of the ANC, the involvement of the SACP within the movement is widely acknowledged, yet Ellis effectively unravels this relationship; for example he demonstrates how this led to an increasingly undemocratic organisation, ravaged by intense factional disputes. Furthermore, many of the more unsavoury aspects of the ANC's past are revealed, depicting numerous incidents of corruption and crime by high-ranking officials, as well as shocking levels of violence and torture directed towards its own cadres. These unnerving disclosures demonstrate how an intricate mix of ideology, security concerns and criminal activity permeated the ANC.

Moreover, *External Mission* expertly weaves the complexity of the ANC's liberation struggle into the broader picture, assessing how it was intimately linked to major events within South Africa and further afield. A fascinating aspect of the book is the lengths to which the apartheid state covertly combated the ANC's struggle. The reader learns of the changing concerns of the National Party leadership; the tensions and infighting between the various branches of state security; the unaccountable covert operations; and the approval of strategies to nullify the threat, including the support and funding of criminal networks across Southern Africa.

A major strength is the way Ellis is able to link many of the developments within the ANC and the apartheid state, to some of the more uncomfortable issues afflicting South Africa today. For example, the ANC's unwavering commitment to democratic centralism, a growing disregard for democracy and the social problems of the country (particularly violent crime) can all be clearly traced to decisions taken during the struggle against apartheid.

I highly recommend this informative and easily accessible book, which casts new light on the history of the ANC which for so long has been privy to myths, distortions and misrepresentation.

MATTHEW GRAHAM

University of Dundee

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